

News Release

Sharing Visions of Gardening in the Community

By Itollefs on Monday, February 24, 2014

Last Thursday evening, community members and University of Minnesota Crookston students, staff, and faculty shared their hopes and dreams on what forms gardening might take in Crookston. Kirsten Fagerlund launched the gathering of some 35 people with actively singing, "My Bonnie lies over the Ocean." This was in keeping with the festive spirit of the third "garden party"and local foods seminar, getting our blood flowing and brains ready for active discussion. Kirsten was joined by city administrator, Shannon Stassen who is equally passionate about the many values of gardening whether it be a backyard plot, a shared garden space at the location of a house demolished for flood protection, a full-fledged community garden where people might be assigned individual plots, or a garden where people buy shares and maintenance is conducted by a manager.

Fagerlund reflected on the need to make gardens very local, accessible to all and to be mindful of how the community will interact with the garden and with each other. "We can build an appeal of sorts akin to 'Victory Gardens' of World War II where citizens were advised to grow things locally because of the demand for resources to fight a war."

From the practical standpoint, Stassen pointed out that there are 220 acres of city property that are mowed annually requiring fuel, labor, time, and equipment maintenance. "We need to take a good look at that land and see what portions might be converted to growing fruits and vegetables, native grass plantings, butterfly gardens, and rain gardens," according to Stassen.

Fagerlund, the Polk-Norman-Mahnomen State-wide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) Coordinator, spoke on the health and wellness benefits associated with gardening. "SHIP is about creating good health by decreasing obesity and reducing the number of people who use tobacco or who are exposed to tobacco smoke. Two out of every three Minnesotans are overweight or obese caused by insufficient physical activity and unhealthy eating. We simply have to be more concerned with what we eat as well as our activity level. All of this is tied to community and how we offer healthy choices. We are off to a great start with work in the Natural Play Space, discussions about our trail systems and now moving into community gardens, but we have to always be mindful of health. The environments in which people live, work, and play have a tremendous impact on their health and the choices they make.

Central Park was mentioned in the group brainstorming. It is centrally located and has some space that might be developed into garden plots that is on higher ground. There are also some south facing slopes where a passive solar, earth-sheltered greenhouse might be developed to service city garden plots. The proper up-front design of a greenhouse is critical to reduce energy costs. Along with this discussion, it was mentioned that there might be some businesses in the Industrial Park that process an excess of heat that is presently exhausted to the atmosphere. This could be trapped and used to economically heat the soil underneath a greenhouse that could be constructed in that area.



In discussing the many values of gardening, long-time Crookston resident and Master Gardener Allen Pederson (at right in photo), pointed out the immense personal satisfaction of growing good food for the table. Shannon Stassen was a sometimes recipient of Pedersen's bountiful garden harvest and tutelage but was gently chided by Allen who noted, "Yes, I taught you how to garden and then your cucumbers and muskmelons were bigger than mine!"

Stassen went on to sing the praises of the bonding values of gardening; between kids and their parents and especially with grandparents. U of M Crookston Vice-Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Barbara Keinath mentioned that she, like a lot of people lives in an apartment. "I need a place where I can grow a few things, where I get my hands dirty in the soil." U of M Crookston student, Lauren Snively emphasized her priority on knowing the source of her food. "I want to know more about my food, was it grown locally, what pesticides were used in its production, and has it been genetically

modified?" Stassen later remarked that, "it was a lot of fun to stick around after the session and visit with several students. They are truly passionate about gardening, wellness, and sustainability. It gets me fired up when I listen to them."

The seminar series started in January featuring Noelle Hardin, a U of MN Extension Educator whose focus is Community Food Systems in northwest Minnesota. The second speaker was Dr. Randel Hanson, environmental scientist and manager of the Campus Garden at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. The next program is March 13 and will feature a panel of local growers. Programs are supported by a mini-grant from the U of M Institute on the Environment to the Center for Sustainability on the Crookston campus and are free and open to all interested in local foods and gardening.

Suppers in food service at the U of M Crookston are free but reservations are required. Attendees are requested to go through the Brown Dining Hall at 5 p.m. and then bring their meal down the hall to the Bede Ballroom. The program will commence at 5:30 p.m. and conclude around 6:30. For reservations for the upcoming free supper and program, call or email Megan Luxford or Tashi Gurung at 218-281-8128 or luxfo003@crk.umn.edu or gurun011@umn.edu. For more information contact Dan Svedarsky at 218-281-8129 or dsvedars@crk.umn.edu.

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